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ABSTRACT

The stress given to film directors and stars in current academic cinema studies unjustifiably ignores the artistic contributions of cinematographers. Frequently, cinematographers are responsible for much of the artistic expression and inventiveness in films. Although determination of the extent of the cinematographer's contribution is difficult, it is possible to assess the frequency with which cameramen are credited for their contributions to award-winning films. A survey of 339 of the "best" feature films produced between 1930 and 1964 indicated that writers, directors, and editors were credited more frequently than cinematographers. It also indicated that a relatively small group of "top" cameramen were acknowledged as contributing to the "best" films of the period. (CH)

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Society of Cinematologists

A LOOK AT THE ROLE OF THE AMERICAN CINEMATOGRAPHER THROUGH A SELECTED LIST OF FILMS

by

Donald E. Staples

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Two years ago I wrote "The Auteur Theory Re-examined' which has been published twice and criticized. This current paper does not contradict or weaken my position taken at that time. My research and ideas have not been altered, nor has a change of attitude come upon me. This paper merely proposes a hypothesis for investigation, does some of the spade work in digging up and sifting out the evidential data, and offers the results of this effort for your consideration.

The auteur theory still exists and is valuable in its original form for studying film history and criticism and for evaluating contemporary motion pictures.

Today, however, I am asking you to examine with me a narrow slice of the specimen; to scrutinize a part of the whole, in order that we may know a little more about the part and its relationship to the whole.

While doing research for A Statistical Study of Award-winning American Films and Their Makers, 1930-1964, I was confronted with graphic data which indicated that the cinematographer, the Director of Photography, had been underrated in his contribution to the best examples of the motion picture art and industry in this country and that this oversight might even be worldwide.

Although we are all aware that Griffith had his Bitzer and Eisenstein had his Tisse, perhaps we are not alert to the accumulated careers of James Wong Howe, William Daniels, and Joseph Ruttenberg. Since so many of the formal conventions of the art of the film medium are encompassed in the work of the Director of Photography--particularly the painterly ones--it behooves us to reexamine the role of the cinematographer through the best examples of the complete film work, not only the cinematic tour de force--the aria for camera.

Kenneth MacGowan inspires this inquiry and challenges the researcher when he says, "I have always felt that no cameraman receives the screen credit his work deserves."[1] And, "No one can say whether the cameraman or the director was responsible for some pictorial effects that may or may not involve tricks."[2]

This latter idea was emphasized by Beaumont Newhall in his interview with D. W. Griffith's famous cinematographer, G. W. "Billy" Bitzer.[3] And, how many of us are aware that it is reported that it was Eduard Tisse, not Sergei Eisenstein, who had the inspiration for the rising lions sequence at the end of the Odessa steps sequence of THE BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN. At the time, Eisenstein "felt lazy, he didn't want to be bothered with work." It was only later, after Tisse's urging, that Eisenstein and company returned to Alupka and filmed the lions to "humor" the cinematographer, Tisse.[4]

These gray bits of empiricism were of enough interest to foster another look at some previously collected data. The data consisted of a sample list of 339 American feature films covering the period from 1930 through 1964 and production facts (primarily screen credits) for each one of the titles.

For purposes of the original major study, the investigation was delimited so that only American films (English language motion pictures produced by a company either based in or financially controlled in the United States) of this thirty-five year period could be included. And all of the selections had to be considered "features", applying criteria of leng' and intent.

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[1]MacGowan, Kenneth. Behind the Screen--The History and Techniques of the Motion Picture. New York: Delacorte, 1965, p. 443

[2]MacGowan, Kenneth, Behind the Screen--The History and Techniques of the Motion Picture, New York: Delacorte, 1965, p. 426

[3]Barry, Iris. D. W. Griffith, American Film Master. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1965, p. 36

[4]Seton, Marie. Sergei M. Eisenstein. New York: A. A. Wyn, 1952, p. 83

At this point, after limiting nationality, type and period, an attempt was made to assemble a list of only the more important, or "best", American feature motion pictures from the thousands of films released during this period.

It seems reasonable to assess the role of the cinematographer by looking at the "best" overall productions rather than looking at mediocre or poor films, or those in which the only redeeming quality of the film is the photography. Therefore criteria were developed to select the best motion pictures from the output of the American feature film industry for the chosen period--1930-1964.

The basis for the criteria was three-fold. In order to establish criteria which would result in the selection of a list of best American feature motion pictures from the selected population, the three major sections of film evaluation had to be consulted--the film makers, the film critics, and the film-going public. To employ the choices of these three groups, it was necessary to discover what their choices had been at the time of the motion pictures' initial release, since each film is made for a distinct marketable period and for the people who will view the film during that time.

The Film Makers. Although there are a number of unions, guilds, and other groups which represent the creators of the motion pictures, the most encompassing organization, and they think the most influential, is the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Composed of more than 2,500 members, this honorary organization was founded in 1927 and has as part of its purpose to "recognize outstanding achievements within the industry" and to "represent the viewpoint of the actual creators of the motion picture."[5]

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[5] What is the Academy? Hollywood: The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, p. 1

This recognition and representation is made public through the bestowing of the Academy Awards--Awards of Merit for outstanding achievements in the motion picture arts and sciences.

The Film Critics. Even though the field of film criticism is a young area in comparison with criticism in the other arts, there is evident a wide variety of criteria and methods. Most film critics are working journalists who are daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly making conscious choices as to which American feature films are the best and which are not the best. For purposes of this study, it seemed necessary to obtain a consensus among the major motion picture critics in order to have their considered judgements as to the best examples.

The only consensus which seemed to fulfill the demands of this study was the yearly agreement of the twelve to fifteen New York critics who gather at the New York Newspaper Guild Headquarters to vote on the New York Film Critics Awards.[6]

The Film-Going Public. Initially it might seem that gross box office receipts would be an indication of the choices of the film-going public, but after closer study it appeared that inflation, the discrepancies between "hard" and "soft" ticket sales, and publicity figures result in unreliable data or misrepresentation.

In order to consider a motion picture one of a number of best films as indicated by the choices of the film-going public, it seemed necessary to use selections which were made after the viewing and consideration of a certain film, not prior to the presentation of the motion picture. Box office figures represent prior considerations of publicity and popularity and could not be used as

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[6]Crowther, Bosley. Letter to the author, July 30, 1965.

an indication of reflective consideration and selection. Therefore a search was conducted to see what representation of public critical opinion could be brought to bear.

The results of this search indicated that one public oriented group seemed to care about the "best" motion pictures for the sake of the medium. It seemed that most other organizations of the film-going public were either religious, educational, or parental in nature and had either a theological, social, or moral axe to grind. The chosen group to represent the film-going public was the Committee on Exceptional Films of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, Inc. since they are a part of "an independent, non-profit organization of public-spirited citizens founded in 1909 to represent the interests of the motion picture public."[7]

The annual selection of motion pictures by these approximately two hundred men and women results in a list of the "Ten Best" for each year. These titles were adopted as representative of the "best" American feature films for 1930-1964 as chosen by the film-going public.

Since the New York Film Critics only give awards for Best Motion Picture, Best Direction, Best Male Performance, and Best Feminine Performance to American motion pictures, and since the quality of acting and directing is the usual criterion upon which the film-going public base their choices, it was decided to use the similar awards of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences so that equivalent weighting would be possible. Therefore, the Academy's Awards of Merit for Best Motion Picture of the Year, Best Achievement in Directing, Best Performance by an Actor, and Best Performance by an Actress were chosen to represent the film makers.

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[7] Films in Review. New York: National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, Inc., 1930-1965, back cover of all issues.

The Award for Best Achievement in Cinematography was not selected as a criterion for "best" motion picture, but these are reported in Appendix A. The reason for this determination was so that all of the crafts could be analyzed without the prejudice of one area being overweighted. Only the comprehensive areas of directing and acting were criteria in the selection of the films to be studied.

The application of the criteria described above to the historical records of film resulted in a list of 339 "best" American feature films for the period 1930-1964.

It was the empirical and statistical analysis of the data surrounding these 339 motion pictures which provided some new insights into the historical analysis of film and raised questions concerning the role of the cinematographer--the director of photography.

During the collection of the screen credits for the selected motion pictures it was noticed that, proportionally, not as many cinematographers were represented in the list as other personnel. All in all, some 5,051 personnel credits were recorded for these 339 motion pictures. Many of these were duplicates, however, and the number of individual persons was considerably smaller. Since only five film making categories were considered in the major study, only four positions can be compared to the list of cinematographers in this smaller analysis.

The number of individuals represented in the five major positions of the sample films was distributed as follows:

Cinematographers	117
Directors	131
Producers	140
Editors	140
Writers	337

Of course, the writers' representation is much larger than the other categories since so many motion pictures carry up to quadruple writing credits.

These data suddenly indicated to me that something was significant in the fact that less cinematographers had been responsible for the 339 American films that had been labeled "best" than any of the other film making categories.

This pointed up that, not only had the good cinematographers been working more steadily than the other crafts, but that fewer cinematographers were responsible for our best films than other film makers.

Had this ever been acknowledged before? Should the role of the cinematographer be reexamined? Does he just take the orders of the director? What and why is this phenomenon?

In order to run the statistical tests desired in the major study, it was necessary to quantify the data. Therefore a rating and ranking system was devised for quantification.

Each of the motion pictures in the selected list of 339 was given a weighted score dependent upon its rank on the list of ten best or its equivalent rank from one of the other awards which had been scaled. Multiple awards in one category and recognition in more than one category resulted in a higher score for certain films due to the consensus within and among the voting triad of film makers, critics, and public.

For convenience of manipulation and because no reason could be found for skewing the curve of scores, a normalized score known as a T score was used in rating the films. This eliminated all minus quantities and raised the scores to whole numbers, with the mean being 50 and the standard deviation 10, providing for easy comparisons.[8]

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[8]Edwards, Allen L. Statistical Methods for the Behavioral Sciences. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964, pp. 111-114.

After the assignment of a numerical rating to each one of the films, a similar score was assigned to each person in the five production categories of director, producer, cinematographer, editor, and writer. Besides receiving a mean score which tended to equalize out the individual differences, each person received an independent mean score for each production. This score gave a comparative look at the five responsible film makers on each production since the score opposite each name indicated the mean score for that person on the other films from the list of 339, and comparative contamination was not present since the score of the production in question was not used in the tabulation. Thus independence was achieved.

It is significant to this study that when the high score for each production was noted and these scores were then accumulated by job categories the cinematographers ranked in the number of times they had received the highest score on a film.

High Independent Mean Score Frequency by Film Title

Directors	131*
Cinematographers	63
Writers	51
Producers	49
Editors	48
Total	342**

*This figure includes thirty entries which were credited for multiple responsibility in which the directorial score tied with or was less than some other score by the same individual.

**The total represents nine ties between two positions (credited to both positions) and six titles which had no independent mean score entries. Therefore just the 339 motion pictures are represented.

This indicated that approximately 20% of the entries had a cinematographer on the production whose score was better for his other films on the list than

the scores of his co-workers represented. The titles of these productions are listed in Appendix B so that the qualitative contribution of the cinematographer to these productions can be pondered.

A glance at this list invites speculation. Josef von Sternberg is known for his photographic excellence, but Lee Garmes, the cinematographer of DISHONORED received the highes score on that film. Similarly Greg Toland received the highest score on CITIZEN KANE, not Orson Welles. This would tend to confirm the suspicions of André Bazin that Director of Photography Toland and the R.K.O. production organization (including editor Robert Wise) were more than slightly responsible for the authorship of CITIZEN KANE.[9] Orson Welles does, however, have the highest score on his production of THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS, which is considered superior to CITIZEN KANE by some critics,[10] though it does not have the latter's photographic brilliance. (It was photographed by Stanley Cortez.)

Besides the comparatively small number of cinematographers present and the high frequency of highest independent mean scores, the number of cinematographers who had four or more productions listed in the 339 selected films was very impressive in comparison with the other groups. Forty-two cinematographers were credited with four or more entries representing a total of 236 films out of the 339.

In the other categories 27 directors had four or more films listed, totaling 169 films, producers 25/140, writers 26/131, and editors 28/143. The names of the cinematographers who photographed four or more of the 339 selected motion pictures are listed in rank order in Appendix C.

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[9]Bazin, André. "De La Politique des Auteurs," Cahiers du Cinema, No. 70, April 1957, p. 8.

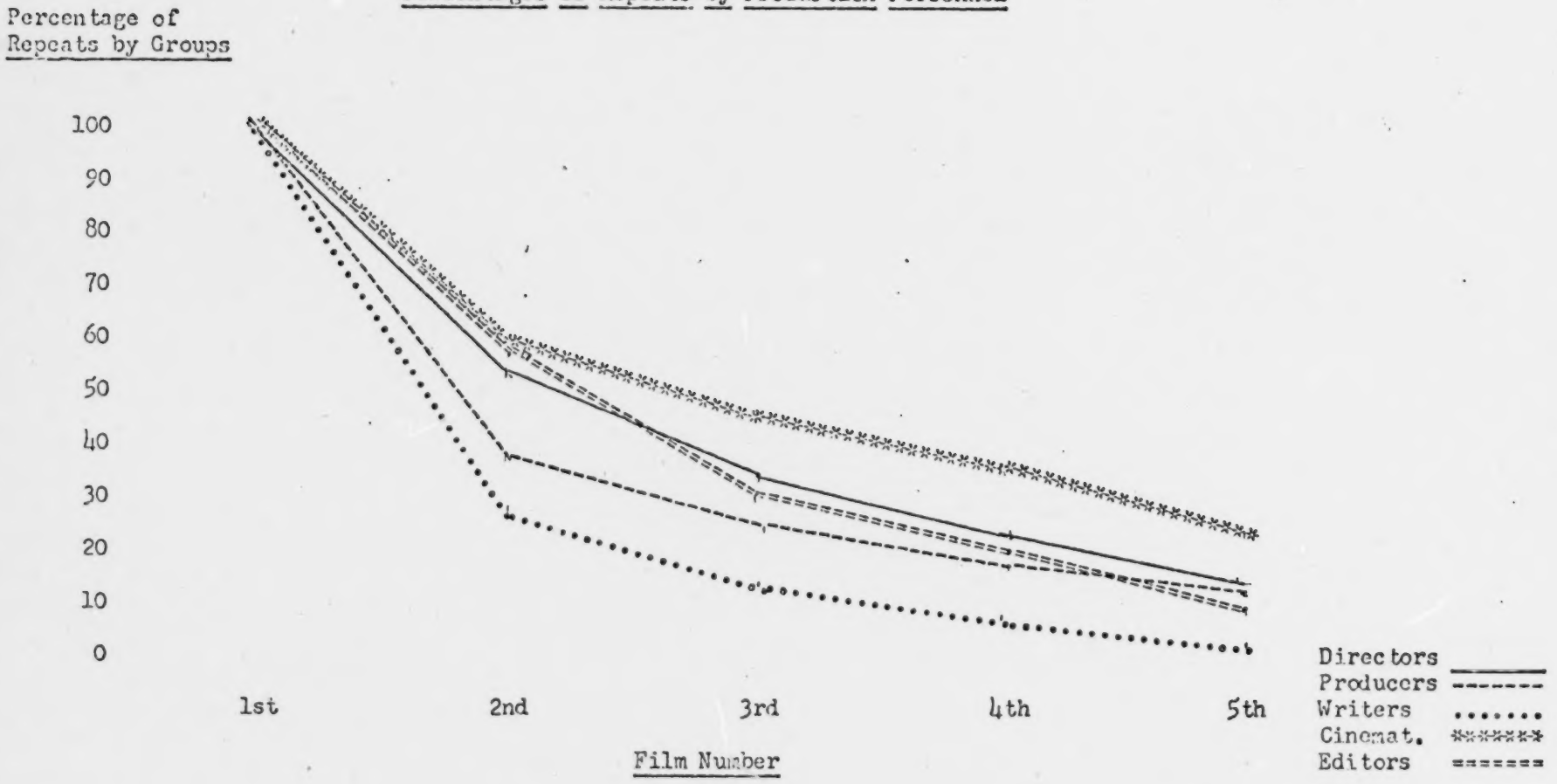
[10]Pechter, William S. "Trials," Sight and Sound, Vol. 33, No. 1, Winter, 1963-64, p. 6

This list of cinematographers contains the names of some of the greatest directors of photography of all time, and they seem to be very familiar proceeding to the slightly less familiar as one scans down the list. It reconfirms the fact that cinematographers seem to work more consistently, resulting in fewer men being responsible for more of the "best" films than in any of the other crafts under examination.

It can be surmised that the tight union membership and the aura of having an A. S. C. (American Society of Cinematographers) director of photography on most major feature film productions have combined to elevate the cinematographer to a place of great importance in the motion picture industry. Because a top cinematographer works on more "best" pictures per year than does, for example, a top writer, his influence on the art of the film industry is greater because of his more frequent creative responsibility.

The attached graph visually underscores this conception. It shows, by groups, the per cent of production personnel in each group who repeated making "best" motion pictures for the second, third, fourth, and fifth time, in comparison to the total number of film makers in that group who had participated in the production of one of the "best" films. With the exception of the line which shows the per cent decline of participating editors as it crosses over first that of the directors and then the producers, the relative positions of the percentages remain fairly constant as each one declines toward the abscissa. This comparison shows the rate of decline to be approximately the same, while graphically illustrating the inverse relationship which develops when fewer persons make up one of the groups--in this case, cinematographers. The per cent of repetitions by individuals in each group is led by the cinematographers. This tends to reconfirm the belief expressed earlier that cinematographers hold a much more important position in the area of artistic responsibility in the

Percentages of Repeats by Production Personnel



film industry of the United States than has generally been attributed to them.

It may have been clear to Kenneth MacGowan what he meant when he contradicted himself by saying, "The cameraman has one great advantage over the director and the cutter. There can never be any doubt about what he contributed. While nobody may be quite sure how much of the editing of a film should be credited to the cutter and how much to the director, everybody knows just what Toland or Cardiff gave to a picture."[11] But do we? I contend we don't know, but we should try to find out.

On some sets and locations we see directors huddled over the viewfinder. On others the director is busy rehearsing the actors and merely calls for a "two-shot", relying on the experience of his cinematographer. As Huss and Silverstein put it, "Directors as formidable as Griffith, Welles, and Lang have carefully heeded the advice of their cinematographers."[12]

D. W. Griffith and "Billy" Bitzer, Charlie Chaplin and Rollie Tetheroh; not to detract from the work of the director, but, maybe there is more of a "Gilbert and Sullivan" or "Rodgers and Hammerstein", credit due in certain cases.

When we consider the image--the moving image--moving in space and time through ever changing compositions of line and mass, light and dark, we become aware not only of the stager who is responsible for the mise-en-scène, but also of the celluloid sculpter who has given light to darkness, has created a third dimension to go with the fourth, and has imposed his frame around it. Like a magician with an infinite array of three-by-four cookie cutters, he swoops through our world precisely releasing sections of it from the director's recipe.

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[11]MacGowan, Kenneth. Behind the Screen--The History and Techniques of the Motion Picture. New York: Delacorte, 1965, p. 444.

[12]Huss, Roy and Silverstein, Norman. The Film Experience. New York: Harper and Row, 1968, p. 148.

Although different in many respects, the art of photography emerged from painting, allowing the painter to go forth to conquer new worlds, while leaving the depiction and redemption of the real world to the man with a camera. This manifest responsibility takes a man with an extra special eye, and it isn't always the same man as the good stager or storyteller.

Of TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD Knight said that, "The camera operated by Eduard Tisse, who was to Eisenstein what Bitzer had been to Griffith--adds further emphasis to these meaningful vignettes."[13] And, "There was a wonderful human eye behind the camera-eye. They were the eyes of Eduard Tisse..."[14]

We shall never know the full story of most of these creative relationships because it takes a special kind of man to be a director of motion pictures and it takes a different type of man to be a director of photography. It is rare when the same man can and has done both as in the case of George Stevens.

Although this paper hasn't definitely proven anything, I hope that it has raised some questions and given a few insights into what might be happening historically to the man behind the camera. Perhaps he is being forgotten with the current adulation of directors. Perhaps his title as Director of Photography is more appropriate than we have ever realized.

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[13] Knight, Arthur. The Liveliest Art. New York: Mentor Books, 1959, p. 82.

[14] Seton, Marie. Sergei M. Eisenstein. New York: A. A. Wyn, 1952, p. 67.

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What is the Academy? Hollywood: The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

APPENDIX A

Academy Awards

Best Achievement in Cinematography

1930	WITH BYRD AT THE SOUTH POLE - Joesph T. Rucker & Willard Van Der Veer
1932	SHANGHAI EXPRESS - Lee Garmes
1933	A FAREWELL TO ARMS - Charles Bryant Lang, Jr.
1934	CLEOPATRA - Victor Milner
1935	A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM - Hal Mohr
1936	ANTHONY ADVERSE - Tony Gaudio
1937	THE GOOD EARTH - Karl Freund
1938	THE GREAT WALTZ - Joseph Ruttenberg
1939	WUTHERING HEIGHTS - Gregg Toland
	GONE WITH THE WIND - Ernest Haller, Ray Rennahan
1940	REBECCA - George Barnes
	THE THIEF OF BAGDAD - George Perrinal
1941	HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY - Arthur Miller
	BLOOD AND SAND - Ernest Palmer, Ray Rennahan
1942	MRS. MINIVER - Joseph Ruttenberg
	THE BLACK SWAN - Leon Shamroy
1943	THE SONG OF BERNADETTE - Arthur Miller
	THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA - Hal Mohr, W. Howard Greene
1944	LAURA - Joseph LaShelle
	WILSON - Leon Shamroy
1945	THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY - Harry Stradling
	LEAVE HER TO HEAVEN - Leon Shamroy
1946	ANNA AND THE KING OF SIAM - Arthur Miller
	THE YEARLING - Chas. Rosher, Leonard Smith, Arthur Arling
1947	GREAT EXPECTATIONS - Guy Green
	BLACK NARCISSUS - Jack Cardiff
1948	THE NAKED CITY - Wm. Daniels
	JOAN OF ARC - Wm. V. Skall, Winton Hoch, Joseph Valentine
1949	BATTLEGROUND - Paul C. Vogel
	SHE WORE A YELLOW RIBBON - Winton Hoch
1950	THE THIRD MAN - Robert Krasker
	KING SOLOMEN'S MINES - Robert Surtees
1951	A PLACE IN THE SUN - Wm. C. Mellor
	AN AMERICAN IN PARIS - Alfred Gilks, John Alton
1952	THE BAD AND THE BEAUTIFUL - Robert Surtees
	THE QUIET MAN - Winton C. Hoch, Archie Stout
1953	FROM HERE TO ETERNITY - Burnett Guffey
	SHANE - Loyal Griggs
1954	ON THE WATERFRONT - Boris Kaufman
	THREE COINS IN A FOUNTAIN - Milton Krasner
1955	THE ROSE TATOO - James Wong Howe
	TO CATCH A THIEF - Robert Burks
1956	SOMEBODY UP THERE LIKES ME - Joseph Ruttenberg
	AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS - Lionel Linden

Academy Awards for Cinematography continued:

1957	THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI - Jack Hildyard
1958	THE DEFIANT ONES - Sam Leavitt
	GIGI - Joseph Ruttenberg
1959	THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK - Wm. C. Mellor
	BEN-HUR - Robert Surtees
1960	SONS AND LOVERS - Freddie Francis
	SPARTACUS - Russell Metty
1961	THE HUSTLER - Eugen Shuftan
	WEST SIDE STORY - Daniel L. Fapp
1962	THE LONGEST DAY - Jean Bourgoin, Walter Wottitz
	LAWRENCE OF ARABIA - Fred A. Young
1963	HUD - James Wong Howe
	CLEOPATRA - Leon Shamroy
1964	ZORBA THE GREEK - Walter Lassally
	MY FAIR LADY - Harry Stradling

APPENDIX B

List of Films from the 339 "Best" Films Where The Cinematographer Had the Highest Independent Mean Score

DISHONORED
THE FRONT PAGE
QUICK MILLIONS
SURRENDER
TABU
GRAND HOTEL
PAYMENT DEFERRED
TARZAN
TWO SECONDS
BERKELEY SQUARE
THREE CORNERED MOON
THE THIN MAN
VIVA VILLA
LES MISERABLES
RUGGELS OF RED GAP
THE DEVIL IS A SISSY
MODERN TIMES
MAKE WAY FOR TOMORROW
THEY WON'T FORGET
THE CITADEL
THE ROARING TWENTIES
WUTHERING HEIGHTS
THE BISCUIT EATER
THE GRAPES OF WRATH
THE LONG VOYAGE HOME
OUR TOWN
WAKE ISLAND
CASABLANCA
THE HARD WAY
THIRTY SECONDS OVER TOKYO
WILSON
MILDRED PIERCE
SPELLBOUND
CROSSFIRE
LIFE WITH FATHER
JOHNNY BELINDA
QUO VADIS
COME BACK LITTLE SHEBA
SINGIN' IN THE RAIN
JULIUS CAESAR
LILI
7 BRIDES FOR 7 BROTHERS
20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA
A MAN CALLED PETER
THE ROSE TATOO
SUMMERTIME
LUST FOR LIFE
FUNNY FACE
I WANT TO LIVE
THE ALAMO
SUMMER AND SMOKE
TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD
LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT
BECKET

APPENDIX C

Ranked Cinematographers with Four or More Entries on the List of 339 "Best" Films

1.	James Wong Howe	11
2.	William Daniels	10
3.	Joseph Ruttenberg	9
4.	Charles Lang	8
	Harold Rossen	
	Joe Walker	
5.	Lee Garmes	7
	Milton Krazner	
	Arthur Miller	
	Leon Shamroy	
	Harry Stradling	
	Greg Toland	
6.	Norbert Brodkin	6
	Arthur Edeson	
	Ernest Haller	
	Frank Planer	
	Robert Surtees	
7.	George Barnes	5
	Robert Burks	
	George Folsey	
	Bert Glennon	
	Robert deGrasse	
	Jack Hildyard	
	Boris Kaufman	
	Peverell Marley	
	William C. Mellor	
	Karl Struss	
8.	John Alton	4
	Lucien Androit	
	Joseph August	
	Daniel Fapp	
	Russell Harlan	
	Ray June	
	Joseph LaShelle	
	Sam Leavitt	
	Joe MacDonald	
	Ted McCord	
	Hal Mohr	
	Oswald Morris	
	Arthur J. Ornitz	
	Rollie Totheroh	
	Leo Tover	

TOTALS: 42 Cinematographers, 236 films.